Chapter 18

The Relevance of Constraints Research to Leisure Service Delivery

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The George Bush Presidential Library and Museum is a big flashy feather in the cap of [Bryan/College Station]....Nearly three-quarters of a million people have visited the museum since it opened in late 1997, which area experts say is impressive. But that number falls short of the goal of 250,000 people a year. (Levey. 2001. p. E1)

Making the parks relevant and welcoming to a broader constituency is a matter of survival and equity for the National Park System in the new millennium. (Wilkinson. 2000. p. 20)

Those of us who are museum professionals have frequently been puzzled by the elusive masses who never enter our museum doors—the non-participants. With all the treasures we offer, why don’t we attract a broader spectrum of the public, a larger audience. a substantial clientele that comes regularly rather than just for blockbusters? (Hood. 1983, p. 50)

The three accounts cited here get at the heart of a central question among leisure service practitioners: Why don’t people use or make greater use of agency offerings? The very success of many leisure service organizations, particularly commercial or private operations, depends on their being able to attract a steady, if not necessarily loyal, stream of customers. Another issue is at stake among public or quasi-public park and recreation entities: How can programs and services be made attractive to population groups who have historically been underserved or underrepresented with regard to visitation and participation? In democratic societies, issues of equity and fairness are very much at stake in terms of how publicly funded leisure service organizations do (or ought to do) business.

Indeed, findings from a variety of studies show marked disparities among population groups in terms of their frequency of participation in different leisure activities, and their use of local, regional, and national public park and recreation services. Studies show nonusers of local and regional parks are disproportionately female, older, members of a minority group, and have lower levels of education and income (Scott & Munson, 1994). Similar patterns are evident in regard to people’s use of locally sponsored recreation programs and facilities (Godbey. Graefe & James. 1992; Howard & Crompton, 1984; Lee. Scott & Floyd. 2001); museums and zoos (Hood. 1993); and national parks, state parks, and historic sites (Dwyer. 1994; Floyd. 1999). Findings like this have led some researchers and policy makers to observe, “leisure has become a source and site of inequality” (Collins & Kennett. 1998. p. 133). Leisure service practitioners may find this indictment harsh. Nevertheless, the consistency of these results should indicate to practitioners they might not fully understand the wants and recreation needs of marginalized groups under their jurisdiction.

Research on leisure constraints can potentially help practitioners to understand why population groups do not make greater use of agency offerings and provide directions about how to allay the conditions that inhibit involvement. Few other areas of leisure research have such an applied focus and roots that stretch back over such a long time. However, as noted by Jackson and Scott (1999), there is little indication that practitioners are applying findings from constraints research to improve service delivery. Both practitioners and students in leisure studies may find constraints research esoteric and lacking in inspiration (Godbey. 1989). If constraints research is to have a positive impact on service delivery, we researchers must do a better job of making our research accessible.
To date, a number of articles and chapters have been written that seek to summarize ideas and findings associated with constraints research (e.g., Goodale & Witt, 1990; Jackson, 1988; Jackson & Scott, 1999). At least two articles have been published whose purpose has been to highlight the practical implications of constraints research. One of these, an article published by Searle and Jackson (1985b), drew attention to four elements of public park and recreation delivery systems that must be examined critically if constraints are to be relaxed. These elements, according to Searle and Jackson, include agency philosophy, policy statements, program planning efforts, and marketing strategies. The other article, written by McGuire and O'Leary (1992), sought to link research to practice by identifying major themes within constraints research. For example, they recognized constraints may shape both preferences and participation, and constraints are more or less important to different groups of people.

Although the pieces by Searle and Jackson (1985b) and McGuire and O'Leary (1992) provided valuable guidance for practitioners, many articles about constraints have been published in the last decade, providing new insights about the relationship between constraints and other facets of leisure behavior. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an up-to-date examination of the practical implications of constraints research. I begin by laying down some general principles gleaned from constraints research. I then summarize findings from studies focusing specifically on constraints to people’s use of leisure service amenities. To my knowledge, no published works, including the piece by McGuire and O’Leary, have summarized this body of literature. Finally, I turn to an examination of how organizational practices and beliefs may actually create barriers to involvement.

The primary audience for this chapter is park and recreation practitioners and students who aspire to be practitioners. Although I focus primarily on publicly funded park and recreation agencies, many of the issues discussed are likely to be applicable to commercial providers as well. The success of both public and commercial entities depends, in part, on locating clients/customers and ensuring client/customer satisfaction. Public and commercial entities are equally likely to target services/products to diverse groups of clients/customers. Constraints research can potentially assist both public agencies and commercial providers as they pursue these ends. An obvious difference between public agencies and commercial entities, of course, is that the latter must make profits to survive. A profit orientation necessarily means that commercial providers can be far more selective in terms of the groups they target. Thus, they can ignore a range of constraints and issues necessarily important to public agencies.

General Principles About Constraints

Before I put forth some general principles, I provide the following working definition of leisure constraints:

- factors that limit people’s participation in leisure activities, people’s use of leisure services (e.g., parks and programs), or people’s enjoyment of current activities

As I will show, I do not believe constraints are insurmountable. A similar term—“barriers”—has this connotation. Rather, I regard constraints as factors within the individual’s life space that must be successfully negotiated if participation or enjoyment is to occur. The principles in this section are gleaned from an array of studies and articles written about leisure constraints, and to an extent constitute a compendium of important “truths” about what researchers now know about leisure constraints. I believe practitioners and leisure service agencies must understand these ideas if they are to effectively moderate the conditions that make participation or visitation problematic. I also make every effort to highlight the practical implications of the different principles put forward. The principles identified in this section include the following:

- constraints influence both participation and preferences.
- time commitments are the most frequently cited constraints to leisure involvement.
- constraints vary across activities and different dimensions of leisure.
- constraints vary by population groups.
- people may negotiate constraints.

Constraints Influence Both Participation and Preferences

Early studies on constraints focused primarily on factors that inhibited people’s participation in desired activities (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Both researchers and practitioners tended to focus on barriers or constraints physical and external to the individual (e.g., lack of facilities). Over time, researchers began to realize constraints could also be internal to the individual and include such things
as personality and individual dispositions. In their influential article on barriers to family leisure. Crawford and Godbey (1987) argued persuasively that constraints affect other facets of people’s leisure beyond just participation. Indeed, they stated our understanding of constraints is facilitated when we consider how they relate to both leisure participation and leisure preferences. They identified three distinct types of constraints—intraperonal, and interpersonal. structural—that help us to better comprehend these relationships.

**Intrapersonal constraints**, according to Crawford and Godbey (1987), are those psychological states that inhibit the acquisition of leisure preferences. The notion of antecedent constraints has a similar connotation (Henderson. Stalnaker & Taylor. 1988; Jackson. 1990a, 1990b). Intrapersonal (or antecedent) constraints include personality needs, religiosity, reference group attitudes, prior socialization, and perceived skills and abilities. Intrapersonal constraints lead people to define leisure activities, services, and locales as inappropriate, uninteresting, or unavailable. To date, intrapersonal or antecedent constraints have been documented among women with stereotypic feminine personalities (Henderson et al., 1988), adolescents with low self-esteem (Raymore. Godbey & Crawford. 1994), and individuals who perceive themselves as helpless (Dattilo. 1994). Individuals with these personality traits are more likely than others to state they lack the interests, skills, confidence, and information to participate in a range of leisure activities.

**Interpersonal constraints** are those barriers that arise out of social interaction with friends, family, and others. In a family context. for example, interpersonal constraints may occur when spouses differ in terms of their respective leisure preferences. As noted by Crawford and Godbey (1987), these differences may impact spouses’ participation and preferences. Likewise, parenthood often reduces how much time new fathers pursue leisure activities independently and increases the extent to which spouses’ leisure activities reflect the preferences of wives (Crawford & Huston. 1993). Interpersonal constraints are probably unimportant in limiting people’s involvement in solitary activities, particularly ones pursued close to home. On the other hand, interpersonal constraints appear to be highly important within the context of group activities and may take the form of gatekeeping mechanisms, scheduling problems, and group disbandment (Scott, 1991). Interpersonal constraints may also take the form of fear of crime. Studies have documented that fear of sexual assault keeps many women from visiting parks and other public recreation areas alone (Whyte & Shaw, 1994). Likewise, research indicates some members of ethnic and racial minority groups do not visit public recreation facilities because they are afraid of being harassed or assaulted by Anglo visitors and law enforcement representatives (Harris, 1997; Rideout & Legg, 2000).

Finally, Crawford and Godbey (1987) conceived structural constraints as those factors that intervene between leisure preferences and participation. They noted structural constraints are how researchers typically conceive barriers and include a variety of factors outside the control of the individual, including “family life stage, family financial resources, season, climate, the scheduling of work activities, availability of opportunity (and knowledge of such availability), and reference group attitudes concerning the appropriateness of certain activities” (p. 124). While many leisure researchers have used these factors to measure constraints, they are truly structural constraints to the extent they actually inhibit individuals from being able to act on their preference.

In a follow-up article, Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) theorized the three categories of constraints are hierarchically related. They argued constraints are encountered first at the intrapersonal level. These constraints were believed to be the most powerful because they have a fundamental impact on people’s motivation for participation. If preferences are formed, the individual may then encounter interpersonal constraints. Participation may be curtailed if the individual is unable to locate suitable partners. If both intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints are absent or successfully overcome, individuals may then bump into structural constraints. If sufficiently strong, structural constraints may result in individuals not participating in a desired activity or at a level of desired intensity.

The three categories of constraints may also interact with one another in ways that further limit people’s ability to use park and recreation facilities (Jackson, Crawford & Godbey, 1993). A few examples highlight how this might work. Fear of being assaulted or harassed at a park (an interpersonal constraint) may inhibit the expression of leisure preferences and result in negative attitudes about outdoor recreation activities in general (an intrapersonal constraint). Similarly, transportation and accessibility problems (typically thought of as structural constraints) may prevent people from acquiring skills and knowledge (intrapersonal constraints) about what kinds of opportunities are available at recreation areas.

These ideas suggest practitioners must recognize constraints may stymie the development of preferences and intervene between preferences and participation. Developing strategies to mitigate constraints will require practitioners to more fully understand how constituents are constrained and incorporate multiple strategies.
in their attempts to alleviate leisure constraints. For example, providing people easy access to an outdoor recreation area or facility may not result in participation unless there is a simultaneous effort to promote positive attitudes about the outdoors, to facilitate skill development, and to ensure visitor safety.

Time Commitments Are the Most Frequently Cited Constraints to Leisure Involvement

Jackson and Scott (1999) noted a consistent core of leisure constraints that cut across a range of studies and samples, including “time commitments, costs, facilities and opportunities, skills and abilities, and transportation and access” (p. 304). In North America, time commitments stand out as the most frequently cited constraint to leisure across an array of studies. Time constraints are the principal reason why people say they have stopped participating in leisure activities (Jackson & Dunn, 1991), do not participate in fitness activities (Mannell & Zuzanek, 1991; Shaw, Bonen & McCabe, 1991), do not participate in desired activities (McCarville & Smale, 1993), do not participate more often in outdoor recreation activities (Mueller, Gurin & Wood, 1962), do not participate in locally sponsored recreation activities and services (Godbey et al., 1992; Howard & Crompton, 1984), and do not visit local parks (Arnold & Shinew, 1998; Scott & Jackson, 1996; Scott & Munson, 1994).

Time constraints stem from a speeding up of the pace of life (see Godbey, this volume). The pressures of work, economic downsizing, and changing gender roles certainly contribute to this (Hochschild, 1997; Schor, 1991). Two other factors that contribute to a speeding up of the pace of life include a seemingly endless number of goods and experiences people may choose from, and the fact that people are increasingly forced to assimilate an abundance of information. The norm in the United States is to “do it all” and many people tirelessly endeavor to become more “physically fit, better read, more traveled, better dressed, better parents, better tennis players, better homeowners, better lovers, and so on” (Scott, 1993, p. 53). Given the finite amount of free time on their hands, many people feel they simply lack the time to do everything they would like to do. From the point of view of service delivery, practitioners must understand that they are in competition over how people allocate their free time. Leisure service agencies that waste people’s time are likely to be shunned by time-conscious constituents. To the point of “committing competitive suicide” (Berry, 1990, p. 31). Leisure service organizations can build into their marketing and programming efforts specific strategies that mitigate time constraints. Three such tactics include providing expanded opportunities to make reservations for facilities and programs, providing opportunities for shorter, more self-directed leisure experiences, and providing complete information about time requirements in promotional literature (Scott, 1993).

Time commitments also emanate from responsibilities individuals take on as caregivers, a role that typically falls to women. Studies show not only are women far more likely than men to report they are busy because of family responsibilities (Henderson & Allen, 1991; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Scott & Jackson, 1996; Searle & Jackson, 1985a), but also the caregiving role among women results in their reducing or ceasing involvement in leisure activities (Dunn & Strain, 2001; Kay & Jackson, 1991). Clearly, if park and recreation agencies are to better serve caregivers, a greater effort must be made to help them meet the circumstances of their lives. As noted by Scott and Jackson (1996), constraints related to child care may be assuaged by offering child care. or by providing facilities in which groups of mothers are able to organize their own cooperative child care arrangements. Likewise, Dunn and Strain (2001) indicated women who care for a sick parent might achieve some relief from adult day care programs or other formal services.

Constraints Vary Across Activities and Different Dimensions of Leisure

Although time constraints are pervasive, it is important to note other constraints figure prominently in why some people do not develop preferences for leisure objects (activities, services, or locales) or participate in activities or use leisure services or amenities. With this in mind, research indicates constraints range in importance depending on the kind of activity in which people participate. In a groundbreaking study of leisure constraints, Jackson (1983) found equipment cost was the most frequently mentioned reason by people for not participating in skiing and a variety of other outdoor recreation activities. Equipment costs, in contrast, were generally inconsequential in limiting people’s involvement in exercise activities, team sports, and tennis. In the same study, overcrowding was among the most frequently cited reason people said they did not participate in racquetball, tennis, and downhill skiing. Overcrowding was not mentioned often among individuals who wished to participate in creative activities and some types of outdoor recreation activities, including backpacking, canoeing,
and cross-country skiing. Jackson (1994) replicated these findings in a more recent study.

Researchers also focused on a variety of criterion variables to measure the influence of constraints against. Some of these variables include nonuse of public park and recreation services, discontinuing/ceasing participation, participation in specific types of activities, inability to increase participation, and insufficient enjoyment of current activities. An important lesson learned from these studies is the intensity of constraints varies across different dimensions of leisure (Hultsman, 1993: Jackson & Dunn, 1991: Jackson & Rucks, 1993: Nadirova & Jackson, 2000). Jackson and Dunn (1991) were the first researchers to systematically examine this issue of “heterogeneity” of leisure constraints in a single study. One interesting finding they reported pertained to impact of equipment costs on initiating and ceasing involvement. Whereas equipment cost was the most important reason why people said they did not initiate new leisure activities, people were far more likely to cite other factors as reasons for stopping participation. Hultsman (1993), in a study of barriers to leisure among adolescents (10 to 15 years old), found key constraints limiting youths’ ability to initiate a new leisure activity included lack of transportation, costs, and parental disapproval. In contrast, program-related factors (e.g., unhappiness with leaders and rules) were the most important factors youths cited for ceasing participation. In a more recent study, Nadirova and Jackson (2000) reported lack of skill was more likely to contribute to people ceasing participation than preventing them from participating in a desired activity. Alternatively, time commitments were more likely to explain why people did not initiate a new activity than it was a cause for ceasing participation.

Collectively, these findings suggest leisure service practitioners

1. will need to be clear about which aspects of constrained leisure they wish to deal with.

2. may have to devise alternative intervention strategies for alleviating constraints to different leisure activities and various facets of leisure behavior.

For example, the results summarized in the previous paragraph suggest program-related factors are likely to play a significant role in why people stop using a leisure service. Thus, practitioners would do well to understand those factors that potentially undermine long-term enjoyment or satisfaction among participants. This is consistent with a model of ceasing involvement developed a decade ago by Searle (1991), who theorized people stop participating in programs “if the rewards do not change and expand as the duration of participation increases” (p. 284).

**Constraints Vary by Population Groups**

Findings from surveys show population groups differ in the nature and intensity of constraints experienced. A low income, for example, is associated with a variety of constraints, including lack of access, fear of crime, and price of equipment (Kay & Jackson, 1991; McCarville & Smale, 1993; Scott & Munson, 1994; Searle & Jackson, 1985a). In contrast, individuals with high income are more likely to cite time commitments as barriers to leisure (Scott & Munson, 1994). Moreover, while time commitments tend to be more problematic among younger and middle-age adults, poor health, lack of companions, and fear of crime are much more likely to keep older adults from participating in leisure activities and visiting local parks (McCarville & Smale, 1993: Scott & Jackson, 1996). Surveys also show the intensity of a constraint increases for individuals who possess two or more “disadvantaged” statuses. For example, people most likely not to use parks because they lack companions are older females with low incomes (Scott & Munson, 1994). Likewise, individuals who do not use parks because they are too busy with family responsibilities are women between the ages of 25 and 45 (Scott & Jackson, 1996).

In-depth and qualitative studies of single population groups have drawn attention to constraints typically ignored in surveys (Jackson & Scott, 1999). These constraints may be particularly problematic for specific segments of the population, as illustrated in the following examples.

- Many women are constrained by an ethic of care (Henderson & Allen, 1991) and a sense of lack of entitlement to leisure (Deem, 1986: Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991). These constraints, which tend to work in tandem, result in many married women putting other people’s needs ahead of their own and not spending time practicing and developing their abilities and knowledge in leisure activities. Married women who choose to participate in activities at an advanced level may go to great lengths to ensure time spent in the activity does not interfere with family obligations (Stebbins, 1992).

- Many women are also acutely constrained by a fear of sexual assault, and feel vulnerable when
they venture out into public (Franck & Paxson, 1989; Riger & Gordon, 1981; Whyte & Shaw, 1994). Women who participate in outdoor recreation activities will often cope by compromising on location and time of day, participating with companions, and taking a dog along on runs and walks (Bialeschki, 1999).

- Some women are also constrained by a negative body image (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; James, 2000). Girls who feel self-conscious about the way they look may limit their frequency of involvement in certain activities (e.g., swimming) or develop strategies to make themselves less visible, including covering up their bodies.

- Learned helplessness, a trait sometimes found among older adults (McPherson, 1994) and people with disabilities (Dattilo, 1994) greatly constrains leisure. Individuals with this condition believe the environment is not responsive to their actions and see little point in trying to develop strategies that would help them to take control of their lives. Thus, helplessness prevents individuals from developing skills and motivation to participate in a range of leisure activities.

- Studies have shown harassment and discrimination in public places are common incidents experienced by many African Americans (Feagin, 1991; West, 1989). Anticipation of harassment may actually lead many Blacks to avoid using parks and outdoor recreation areas away from home (Harris, 1997; Rideout & Legg, 2000).

- Studies indicate age-related norms are strongly held by older adults (McPherson, 1994; Ostrow & Dzewaltowski, 1986). These norms constrain older adults’ involvement in sport and physical activity because participation is felt to be the privilege of younger people.

Results reported in this section strongly point to the need for practitioners to be sensitive to the salience of population-specific barriers and to individualize their planning and marketing strategies for relieving constraints to different population segments. Efforts to assuage constraints to middle-age adults, for example, are potentially very different from efforts to relieve constraints among older adults. Likewise, practitioners will probably need to develop different strategies for reducing constraints among low-income constituents than for upper or middle-income groups. Results reported here also suggest practitioners would benefit by incorporating multiple variables in their planning and marketing strategies (Jackson & Henderson, 1995). For example, practitioners may develop strategies for reducing barriers among low-income females, middle-age females, low-income older adults, and so on.

People May Negotiate Constraints

It is important to note many people participate in leisure activities despite encountering constraints. In an influential article, Jackson et al. (1993) postulated “participation is dependent not on the absence of constraints (although this may be true for some people) but on negotiation” [italics added] through them” (p. 4). Negotiation here refers to those strategies that people use, individually or collectively, to overcome the effects of one or more constraints. Jackson and his colleagues proposed a three-category typology of people based on their responses to constraints: Some individuals react by not participating (reactive response), others do not reduce or change their participation (successful proactive response), and others participate but in an altered manner (partly successful proactive response). The typology has been partly supported in a study of constraints negotiation among women with physical disabilities (Henderson, Bendini, Hecht & Shuler, 1995).

A recent study reported by Hubbard and Mannell (2001) indicated the presence of a constraint may actually “trigger negotiation efforts, which appear to...counteract the negative influence of constraints to some extent” (p. 158). Hubbard and Mannell provided evidence individuals who are highly motivated to participate are likely to work hard at negotiating constraints. These findings are consistent with Stedins’s (1999) work on serious leisure, which indicates that highly committed leisure participants persevere despite encountering hardships and disappointments.

Moreover, people’s ability to negotiate constraints appears to be related to the types of constraints they encounter. Support for this generalization comes from a study reported by Shaw et al. (1991). In that study, individuals who said they encountered some kinds of constraints (time commitments, costs, quality of available facilities) were actually more likely to participate in physical activities than individuals who did not report them. In contrast, individuals who said they ran into other types of constraints (low energy and poor health) participated less often in physical activities than individuals who did not cite these barriers.

Together, findings reported in this section suggest despite encountering constraints people still participate in leisure activities. On the one hand, these findings could lead practitioners to become complacent and cyni-
cal about constraints research in general. Some researchers have publicly articulated this point of view (Samdahl & Jekubovich. 1997). On the other hand, I would hope the findings reported here would actually embolden practitioners. A major implication I draw from all this is that people actively seek to negotiate constraints and practitioners are in an outstanding position to assist them in their efforts.

Constraints to Use of Park and Recreation Services

There now exists a small but growing number of studies devoted specifically to why people do not use public park and recreation services. Either by design or chance, these studies have focused on slightly different aspects of nonparticipation. Some researchers, for example, have examined constraints to greater use of local park and recreation services generally (Godbey. 1985: Godbey et al.. 1992; Howard & Crompton. 1984: Schroeder & Wiens. 1986). While others have limited their focus to why people do not use local or regional parks (Arnold & Shinew 1998: Scott & Jackson. 1996: Scott & Munson. 1994). A few studies sought to determine why people do not use specific facilities, such as public golf courses in Chicago (Gobster. 1998), the Fort Worth Nature Center (Rideout & Legg. 2000). and the Toledo Museum of Art (Hood. 1983). Simultaneously, while most studies focused on nonparticipants, at least one study had participants. in this case park visitors, indicate whether or not different factors limited their use of community or neighborhood parks (Arnold & Shinew 1998). Findings reported from different studies of nonuse of park and recreation services augment our understanding of constraints in general by providing insight into site-specific constraints to involvement and identifying strategies that may possibly help people to negotiate barriers they encounter.

Site-Specific Constraints

As already noted, time constraints are the most frequently cited reasons why people do not use parks and recreation services (Arnold & Shinew. 1998: Howard & Crompton. 1984: Godbey et al.. 1992; Scott & Jackson. 1996). Here we turn our attention to other factors researchers discovered to be relatively important constraints to people’s use of park and recreation programs and services. At least two of these—lack of interest and safety concerns—are ones not typically examined by constraints researchers in general.

Lack of Interest

Researchers historically have been uncertain about whether or not to include lack of interest as a leisure constraint. This ambivalence is reflected, for example, in the writings of Ed Jackson. At one point he noted lack of interest is not a “true” barrier to participation (Jackson & Dunn. 1988). Elsewhere he argued, “to exclude from an investigation those people who apparently are not interested in participating will likely underestimate the number of people who experience constraints on their leisure” (Jackson. 1990a, p. 58). Lack of interest can readily be conceived as an intrapersonal constraint because these deal with factors that shape or limit the development of leisure preferences (Crawford et al.. 1991: Crawford & Godbey. 1987: Scott. 1991). Furthermore. some public and commercial entities do not have the luxury of ignoring constituents and consumers who eschew their services and products. Stated differently. their livelihood depends on their being seen as relevant.

Howard and Crompton’s (1984) study of nonparticipation in Dade County, Florida; Austin. Texas; and Springfield. Oregon, demonstrated lack of interest figured rather prominently as to why people did not use park and recreation services in those communities. In Austin, for example. 27% of residents reported they prefer to stay at home, 21% said they never think about going, and 18% said they were not interested. Corroborating these findings. Schroeder and Wiens (1986) reported lack of interest was the most frequently mentioned reason by residents of Tulsa, Oklahoma. For not using public swimming pools (45%), community centers (53%), and parks and playgrounds (53%). Groups most likely to cite lack of interest according to Schroeder and Wiens were older adults and individuals with low levels of income and education. More recently. Gobster (1998) found lack of interest to be an important constraint to people’s involvement in golf in Chicago, particularly among Hispanic and African American youth. According to Gobster, they felt golf “was not fun, was boring, uninteresting, lacked excitement, and was not ‘up-to-date’ compared with the sports most teens currently enjoyed” (p. 55).

Marilyn Hood’s (1983. 1989. 1993) research on museum visitors provided valuable insight into lack of interest as a reason for nonparticipation. She pointed out lack of interest stems from the inability of museums to appreciate the benefits that large numbers of people seek during their leisure time. For example, museums tend to ignore the fact that many family groups are looking for places where they can do things together. Hood argued family groups are likely to stay away from museums if this need is not consistently satisfied. A related source of lack of interest stems from mental saturation. Hood
opined that “we are still pummeling visitors by overloading them mentally and physically, and then complaining that too few guests read every label, look at every object, or followed the sequence we laid out for them” (Hood, 1993, p. 18). Although it is possible people are not aware museums can provide some of the benefits they desire, Hood’s counsel remains valid: Museums must better understand what the public wants and plan accordingly. Park and recreation agencies, in general, would do well to heed this advice.

Lack of Information

Nonparticipation in public park and recreation services can be partly explained by the fact that people lack sufficient information about agency offerings. In a study of nonparticipation of park and recreation services in an eastern city, Godbey (1985) found residents reported varying degrees of awareness of local amenities. While only a handful (9%) of those polled did not know that the city had a zoo, close to 90% indicated they were not aware that the city had community centers. An additional 64% said they did not know that the city had an environmental center, and 40% reported that they did not know about public golf courses or the city’s tennis programs. In a nationwide study, Godbey et al. (1992) found lack of information was the second most frequently mentioned barrier, behind lack of time, by Americans for not participating in locally sponsored recreation activities. In this case, one third of Americans said lack of information was why they did not participate in local recreation programs.

A handful of studies indicated specific groups within the population may be more constrained in their use of park and recreation services by lack of information. Young adults and people with lower levels of education were significantly more likely than their respective counterparts to cite lack of information as a reason for not using local parks (Scott & Jackson, 1996; Scott & Munson, 1994). Lack of awareness and knowledge appears to play a role in why ethnic and racial minorities do not use public golf courses in Chicago (Gobster, 1998), do not use outdoor recreation facilities away from home (Scott & Kim, 1998), and do not participate in recreation activities on public lands (Roper Starch, 1998). These results tentatively suggest lack of information is more or less important depending on the amenity in question and may constrain some subgroups more than others.

Safety Concerns

Studies have also documented that safety concerns figure prominently in why some people do not visit parks and outdoor recreation areas. By safety concerns, we refer to fear of crime, harassment, and discrimination, as well as fear of natural elements. Fear of crime was among the most frequently cited reasons why people do not use parks in greater Cleveland (Scott & Jackson, 1996; Scott & Munson, 1994). Nearly one third of nonvisitors said fear of crime was a very important reason for not using local and regional parks. Moreover, among individuals with low incomes, it was the most frequently cited constraint to park use—53% said fear of crime important was very important in limiting their use of parks. Fear of crime was also the most frequently cited reason for not visiting parks among older adults. Women, too, tended to be more constrained by fear of crime than men. Arnold and Shinew (1998), likewise, found fear of crime and gang activity were among the most important factors that limited park visitors’ use of community or neighborhood parks in Chicago. Unlike the studies reported by Scott and his colleagues, however, no significant differences were found between males and females or among income groups.

Studies indicate safety concerns figure prominently in why some ethnic and racial minorities may not use public park and recreation areas outside their community. In a study of people’s use of regional parks in the Detroit area, West (1989) reported Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to report experiencing racial tensions. Gobster (1998) reported some African Americans feel unwelcome at Chicago golf courses because they are regarded as being used principally by Whites. In their study of why minorities do not visit the Fort Worth Nature Center, Rideout and Legg (2000) found many adult African Americans expressed a fear of discrimination and police harassment in surrounding rural communities. Interestingly, they also found a common barrier among African American youth was fear of natural elements (e.g., fear of snakes). Collectively, these studies indicate park and recreation agencies must be committed to strengthening and sensitizing law enforcement efforts and ensuring park employees are responsive to safety needs among minority visitors.

Opportunities and Access

Leisure researchers have long used opportunity theory to explain nonparticipation in outdoor recreation activities and nonuse of outdoor recreation amenities. The essence of opportunity theory is simple: Involvement in a given activity depends on the availability of facilities and amenities (Hendee, 1969). Support for the perspective is widespread. Using data from the first Outdoor Recreation Survey, Hauser (1962) reported participation
in fishing and hunting is higher among people who live in rural areas and outside metropolitan areas. In contrast, participation rates in walking for pleasure and attending outside concerts were higher among urban residents. Likewise, Beaman, Kim, and Smith (1979) found the supply of outdoor recreation amenities contributed significantly to Canadians' participation in skiing, hunting, and fishing above and beyond the effects of sociodemographic factors. A study by Kim and Fesenmaier (1990) demonstrated Texans' use of state parks close to home was positively related to their supply. Moreover, Texans who lived close to many state parks had more options and thereby tended to visit a single park less than those individuals who had had fewer parks close to home.

Hendee (1969) observed one implication of opportunity theory is groups who have historically been denied access to outdoor recreation facilities and amenities will use them if appropriate services are made available. The National Park Service, for example, justified the development of national recreation areas in or near urban areas precisely on these grounds. However, the reality is these and other park and recreation sites continue to be inaccessible to poor individuals. Studies show lack of transportation and fees and charges are major constraints to leisure participation (Kay & Jackson, 1991: Searle & Jackson, 1985a) and use of local and regional parks (Scott & Munson, 1994) among individuals with low levels of income. Scott and Munson, for example, found 28% of individuals with low income (less than $15,000) said lack of public transportation was a very important barrier to their use of parks, compared to less than 1% of individuals with high income (more than $50,000). Moreover, 35% of individuals with low income said parks were too far away, compared to 3% of people with high income. While only 15% of individuals with low income said costs were very important in limiting their use of parks, nobody in the highest income category cited this factor as very important. These results suggest availability of opportunities is indeed related to people's use of parks and outdoor recreation environments, but accessing opportunities is problematic for poor individuals because they are "transportation disadvantaged" and lack the discretionary income to pay for admission fees.

Helping People Negotiate Constraints

While researchers have done a reasonably good job of identifying salient constraints to people's use of park and recreation services, limited information exists about what specific strategies, within practitioners' control, may potentially ease barriers to involvement. One study that addressed this issue was reported by Scott and others (Scott & Jackson, 1996; Scott & Munson, 1994). They asked nonusers and infrequent users of parks in Northeast Ohio whether or not certain changes in park operations or programming might result in their using public parks more often. More than 70% of those sampled said they might use parks more if they were made safer or more information was provided about existing parks and park programs. Over half said they might use parks more often if more activities were provided or parks were developed closer to home.

The study also revealed striking differences across different population groups. Individuals with low incomes, for example, were far more likely than those with higher incomes to report they might visit parks more often if they were made safer, costs were reduced, parks were developed closer to home, and public transportation to parks was provided. Likewise, women and African Americans reported that if parks were safer they might visit them more often. African Americans were also significantly more likely than Whites to report they might visit parks more often if more activities were provided. These results augment those reported previously: Population groups who report specific constraints to use of parks also report they might use parks more often if these constraints are removed.

Institutional Barriers and Recreation Need

The research we summarized thus far examined constraints from the point of view of the individual. What is missing from constraints research is an examination of how everyday practices within leisure service agencies and practitioners' beliefs about constituents may actually contribute to nonparticipation among segments of the population. These practices and beliefs are deeply embedded in the normal everyday functioning of leisure service agencies and perpetuate inequality in terms of access to park and recreation amenities. Our focus in this section is to show how institutional barriers systematically constrain leisure involvement among disenfranchised groups. The ideas presented here are based, in part, on those published elsewhere (Scott, 2000).

The framework for this discussion borrows from ideas about institutional discrimination and racism developed by Baron (1969), Williams (1985), and Feagin and Feagin (1986). First, the perspective maintains inequalities within major institutional spheres (e.g., economy and labor market, education, housing, and
politics) are mutually reinforcing and systematically perpetuate inequality over time. These inequities no doubt impact people’s access to leisure opportunities and abilities to acquire leisure skills (see Figure 18.1). Second, outwardly neutral organizational practices in the present systematically reflect or perpetuate the effects of preferential treatment in the past. The perspective, thus, encourages us to examine inequality and oppression in terms of longstanding structural arrangements in society. Institutional discrimination is insidious because inequality stems from everyday practices deep-rooted within organizations and perceived by organizational members and nonmembers as being legitimate.

One way leisure service organizations may perpetuate inequality is by adopting an entrepreneurial approach to service delivery. Such an approach gives primacy to revenue production through the use of fees and charges, privatization, and efficiency. In some communities and agencies where these practices are used, social equity appears to be becoming less important in decisions concerning resources and services (Foley & Pirk, 1990). Consequently, many people living in poorer communities find the quantity and quality of available park and recreation services have worsened. These practices have been fairly well-documented and criticized by others (e.g., Goodale, 1991; More, 2002).

A less obvious organizational practice is promoting customer loyalty. Should tax dollars continue to become scarcer, practitioners will probably become increasingly driven to promote customer loyalty. Loyal patrons are desired because they are believed to provide leisure service agencies with long-term sources of income and support for bond measures that potentially expand recreational services (Selin, Howard, Udd & Cable, 1988). To maximize customer loyalty, practitioners are increasingly adopting a service quality perspective. Emphasizing customer loyalty and service quality are laudable, if not necessary goals, but these practices may result in agencies deemphasizing concern over social equity and inclusion. The reason for this is these practices give primacy to the interests and needs of individuals and groups who historically used an agency’s facilities and services. For example, the vast majority of interpretive exhibits at national and state parks celebrate European American experiences, conquest, exploration, and heritage (Taylor, 2000). Missing are those stories reflecting the experiences of African Americans, Chinese Americans, Mexican Americans, and so on.

Another factor that keeps many leisure service agencies from better serving marginalized groups is employees do not resemble the population at large. Allison (1999) has done an outstanding job of documenting how park and recreation agencies deal with workplace diversity. Her recent work showed diversity policies and practices tended to be more symbolic than substantive and agencies engage in selective and exclusionary hiring of women and people of color. These policies keep agencies from developing an organizational culture where ideas about diversity and inclusion are fundamental to the organization’s mission. Consequently, many practitioners lack the skills to appreciate the needs of disenfranchised groups. Without a multicultural and diverse staff, leisure

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**Figure 18.1. Institutional milieu of leisure (adapted from Baron, 1969)**

- Housing: Access to leisure services
- Job: Discretionary income
- Leisure outcomes: Skills, preferences, attitudes
- Schools: Facilities and connections
service agencies ultimately fall prey to what Allison (2000b) described as “cultural imperialism.” This is the tendency to accept dominant groups’ perspectives and experiences as the norm and make invisible the viewpoints of subordinate groups.

Finally, practitioners’ definitions of recreation need may create organizational barriers. These definitions may very well be the glue that keeps in place all the other agency practices described here. As noted by Godbey (1994), there are different ways to define recreation need (e.g., expressed need, comparative need, created need, normative need, and felt need) and each carries different value assumptions and beliefs about constituents. According to Godbey, within the context of public and park and recreation delivery, these values and beliefs are necessarily in conflict with one another:

One believes either that each citizen should have an equal amount of public recreation resources or that some subgroup should be given priority. One believes either that government should seek to be culturally neutral, reacting to what the public says and does during leisure, or that government should promote certain activities and experiences and discourage others. You believe either that experts are in a position to prescribe desirable minimums of certain types of recreation resources, or you do not. (p. 307)

Determining recreation needs is very much a matter of interpretation and definition, and mediated by the interests and beliefs of practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders (Scott, 1997). How practitioners define recreation needs will ultimately dictate how they interpret nonparticipation and the extent to which they believe leisure constraints are a proper concern of their leisure service organization. From what I have observed, there is a tendency for many agencies to provide services in terms of expressed need. This conception of recreation need, according to Godbey (1994), holds that people’s need for leisure is based on what they are currently doing and assumes constituents are fully capable of self-determination, constituents have equal means and access to leisure resources, and there is relatively just distribution of recreation and park resources. Henderson (1997) made a similar point: “Onus is always on individuals.... In North American society, we are socialized to ‘pull ourselves up by the bootstraps’ and to be personally responsible for our fate” (p. 456). History has seemingly proved practitioners right—many will say their facilities, programs, and campgrounds are already at or near capacity. Organizations and practitioners who provide services using this paradigm need not incorporate a conception of a “constrained constituent” within their planning and marketing efforts. Nonuse of a given service or amenity can justifiably be explained in terms of strongly held interests in alternative activities, locales, or services.

No doubt most practitioners would be unsettled with the charge they are prejudiced. are insensitive to the needs of disenfranchised populations under their jurisdiction, and engage in discriminatory behaviors. From what I have seen, most practitioners intend to treat all people fairly, but despite their best intentions. in some cases inequality is perpetuated. The practices and beliefs highlighted here are, in the words of Goodale (1999), “externally compelling forces that are systemic.” They have a taken-for-granted quality and may well perpetuate inequity in terms of access to leisure services and resources. If leisure service agencies are to better serve marginalized groups and actively reduce leisure barriers from within and from without, they must broaden their conception of recreation need.

Some agencies do just that. In Texas, urban outreach programs, in conjunction with grants provided by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, are working to introduce minority youth to a range of outdoor recreation activities. Individuals involved in these programs acknowledge youth will not participate in backpacking, fishing, hunting, and a variety of other outdoor recreation activities unless they are taught to appreciate them first. These organizations have defined, explicitly or implicitly, recreation need in terms of created need. In effect, practitioners involved in these efforts regard youth as being constrained in terms of interests and skills. Commercial leisure service organizations also work within this paradigm as they “seek to create a need through advertising or by teaching people how to participate in or enjoy their services” (Godbey, 1994. p. 307).

Alternatively, some practitioners (and many researchers) embrace the notion of comparative need. The three key value assumptions of this perspective include the following:

1. recreation resources may not be justly distributed.
2. people have varying abilities to access leisure amenities.
3. individuals with low socioeconomic status have a greater need for public park and recreation services (Godbey, 1994).

Individuals working out of this paradigm are far more likely than others to believe park and recreation agencies have a special mandate to meet the recreation needs of marginalized groups in society. They are also far more likely to believe that many people lack the resources to effectively negotiate constraints by themselves.
(Henderson, 1997). To more effectively meet the needs of marginalized groups, Allison (2000a) advocated leisure service agencies be antidiscriminatory (as opposed to being nondiscriminatory). To this end, she believes agencies should work toward developing an organizational culture where ideas about diversity and inclusion are fundamental to the organization’s mission and strategic plans.

Conclusion

In this chapter I highlighted how constraints research may assist practitioners in their efforts to research population groups who do not make greater use of agency offerings. Findings and principles gleaned from constraints research can be incorporated into policy, planning, and marketing efforts of the leisure service organization (Searle & Jackson, 1985b). As I also noted, barriers or constraints may stem from organizational practices and beliefs about constituents. To more effectively meet the needs of marginalized groups, practitioners must broaden their conception of recreation need.

To conclude this chapter, I put forward two areas of future inquiry I believe are most pressing. First, it is imperative researchers work closely with practitioners to determine how effectively changes in operations alleviate leisure constraints. This is a formidable task. Single-subject methods and field experiments have been used effectively to look at the effects of program design in effecting change among people with disabilities. Similar efforts should be used in assessing the impact of change in park and recreation delivery on changes in use among constituents in general (Jackson & Scott, 1999).

A second area of research is to examine practitioners’ attitudes about the utility of constraints research and definitions of recreation need. How practitioners incorporate constraints research into practice will depend on their ability to give prominence to one conception of recreation need over another. Research that reveals how practitioners define recreation need may well provide information that bridges the gap that currently exists between practitioners and researchers.

References


Scott, D. (2000). Tic, toc, the game is locked and nobody else can play! *Journal of Leisure Research, 32,* 133–137.


